

URBAN CLIMATE GOVERNANCE IN FRANCE

Limitations and Solutions to Water Governance Capacity in French Mid-Sized Cities

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Abstract

In this report, the authors provide a picture of the climate challenges in France, by focusing primarily on water governance in mid-sized cities. Three case studies are analysed: Saint-Nazaire, Bourg-en-Bresse and Arles. Based on these cities, the report identifies the main water-related threats faced by French territories. The authors lay out the policies of climate adaptation from the international level to the municipal one and how they affect the precious resource. The report then presents a more investigative section in an attempt to understand why France isn't meeting the European targets set to achieve the good status of waters. Broken down into problems identified through interviews and research as well as potential solutions, the section uses the conceptual tool of governance capacity. The latter is divided into five subcategories: legal, resource, managerial, learning and political capacities. Having identified the shortcomings in the water governance of three case studies, the authors offer solutions that can be used by other French mid-sized cities dealing with water-related issues exacerbated by climate change.

Executive Summary

As most of the world's population lives in urban areas, the impacts of climate change will be overwhelmingly felt in cities. For this reason, it is imperative that cities develop robust climate adaptation and mitigation strategies to curb the physical and socioeconomic impacts of climate change. Large cities tend to have greater capacities to govern the ecological transition than mid-sized cities, including access to more economic, human, and technological resources. The focus of this report is to demonstrate the climate-related issues and the governance challenges faced by mid-sized cities in France and propose recommendations for ways to increase their governance capacity. As most physical impacts of climate change in France relate to water, such as drought and flooding, this report analyses climate change governance through the lens of water resource management. Case studies of three mid-sized French cities are presented, each city representing a unique geography with specific climate challenges. The selected cities include the coastal city of Saint-Nazaire, the riverine city of Arles, and the piedmont city of Bourg-en-Bresse. Environmental actors from the three cities, as well as actors from higher levels of government, were interviewed to gain insights into the governance challenges faced by mid-sized cities. The insights from these actors, backed by academic literature, were condensed into concrete challenges and limitations to climate change governance.

This research project is based on the analysis of Comité 21's order, which described three objectives for this capstone project:

- To identify the main current or future changes that will challenge France, thinking about the country of tomorrow;
- To demonstrate how these transformations are related to each other and the current policies in place;
- To identify the shortcomings of the current territorial organisation, and illustrate with proposals for legal and institutional changes at different scales.

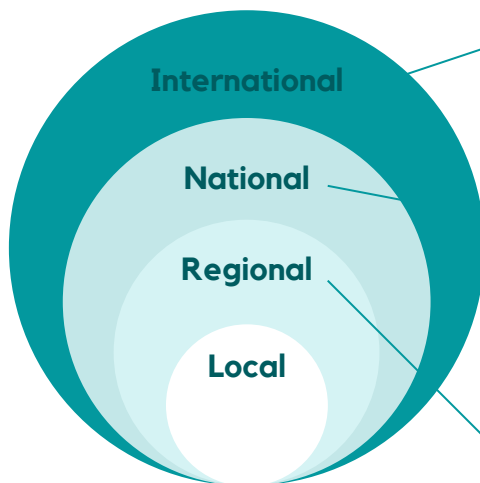
Climate change in three cities

In coastal regions, as demonstrated in the case study of Saint-Nazaire, impacts of climate change include flooding and sea level rise

Riverine regions, such as Arles, are subject to flooding, drought, and agricultural loss as a consequence of changes in precipitation patterns

Piedmont regions, where Bourg-en-Bresse is located, are particularly vulnerable to heat waves and drought.

Current policy framework



At the international scale, French policy is shaped by entities such as the United Nations and the European Union. For water, there are European guidelines such as the Water Framework Directive of 2000.

These legal frameworks unite member states through common objectives while allowing the states to create national plans to tailor the directives to their own national contexts. The national government sets guidelines that shape lower levels through schémas directeurs that promote policy coherence.

Water governance in France is multilateral, with both state and local actors responsible for the sustainability of the country's water resources.

Six water agencies

These agencies are the executive bodies governing the six water basins in metropolitan France. Their primary task is to provide funding for different projects in their respective basins. Recent legislation for climate change adaptation has delegated more power to local-level intermunicipalities, or Établissements Publics de Coopération Intercommunale (EPCIs). This includes the competence of flood prevention, or la gestion des milieux aquatiques et la prévention des inondations (GEMAPI). Local level governments are thus faced with increased responsibilities regarding climate change governance. As the impacts of climate change continue to threaten water resources throughout the country, robust climate change policies are more crucial.

Governance challenges and solutions

Challenges and limitations of climate change governance in mid-sized cities, particularly regarding the governance of water resources, are analysed through the framework of governance capacity.

	PROBLEMS	SOLUTIONS
LEGAL CAPACITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Decentralization • Transboundary climate risks 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contextualising and localizing national policies • Urban planning
RESOURCE CAPACITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lack of economic, human and knowledge resources 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased funding • Regulating public-private partnerships • Expertise
MANAGERIAL CAPACITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Coordination challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Local Climate Resilience Officers • Adaptation measures with co-benefits • Monitoring/Evaluation systems • Digital governance tools
LEARNING CAPACITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Uncertainty • Knowledge and information sharing challenges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Policy experimentation • Digital engagement tools • Knowledge sharing with different cities
POLITICAL CAPACITY	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Absence of political vision • Lack of vertical support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Key role of citizens and mayors • Multi-level governance visions • Accountability: meeting targets

Urban Metabolism

Although urban metabolism isn't yet used in many areas of policymaking, it could be explored as an answer to growing climate risks. Cities are not isolated entities, so understanding how they interact with their surrounding regions is a critical component in reducing urban ecological footprints. Urban metabolism is an interdisciplinary approach to studying the sustainability of cities, which focuses on resource flows in and out of cities. Navigating urban climate policies through the lens of urban metabolism enables city officials to view sustainability issues as part of an interconnected system. Identifying material flows with high consumption patterns, for example, can illustrate to officials where they should focus their policies.